DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 460 787 PS 030 097

TITLE	What Should Parents Know about Information Literacy?
INSTITUTION	ACCESS ERIC, Rockville, MD.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	NLE-2000-4300
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	6p.
CONTRACT	RK95188001
AVAILABLE FROM	ACCESS ERIC, 2277 Research Blvd., 6L, Rockville, MD 20850. Tel: 800-538-3742 (Toll Free). For full text: http://www.accesseric.org/resources/parent/parent.html.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Access to Information; Elementary Secondary Education; *Information Literacy; *Information Skills; *Parent Materials; Parent School Relationship; Parents as Teachers; Student Needs

ABSTRACT

This brochure explains the concept of information literacy, showing why information literacy is important for children, describing how parents can help children become information literate, and directing parents to additional resources. Information literacy is defined as the ability to access, evaluate, and use information effectively. The brochure explains that school-aged children can use information literacy skills to manage their time effectively, make informed decisions, maximize employment opportunities, and increase job success. Suggestions for encouraging information literacy in children include encouraging, supporting, and guiding children in exploring their interests; showing them how to evaluate information; teaching them about authors, and instructing them to consider the reliability of information from the Internet. The brochure explains what parents should know about information literacy in the schools and lists organizations offering information literacy resources. (Contains 11 references.) (KB)

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What Should Parents Know About Information Literacy?

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You have probably noticed that the way students research and discover information has changed tremendously since you were a child. Students now have more ways than ever to find information for their schoolwork and their daily lives. With so many different resources available, students today need special skills—the skills of information literacy—to seek out information and to understand, evaluate, and apply what they find. Increasingly, it is more crucial—and more difficult—to be able to filter out information that is biased or unnecessary and weave together a vast amount of relevant information. The extent to which your children master these skills when they are young will have a significant effect on their quality of life as adults. This brochure explains the concept of information literacy, shows why information literacy is important for your children, describes how you can help your children become information literate, and directs you to additional resources.

What Is Information Literacy?

According to the Association of College and Research Libraries [ACRL (1999, 2000)], "information literacy" refers to the ability to access, evaluate, and use information effectively. It calls for a wide range of skills, including the ability to

- Use information to solve problems and make decisions.
- Share knowledge using appropriate formats for intended audiences.
- Use a variety of information resources, including professional associations or organizations (such as information clearinghouses), books, newspapers and journals (often stored on microfilm or microfiche in libraries), and computer-based resources (such as software, CD-ROMs, e-mail, and the Internet).
- Adapt to new technology.
- Learn independently throughout life.

Why Should My Children Be Information Literate?

School-aged children can use information literacy skills to find material for their reports and projects; to research opportunities for higher education, internships, and jobs; and to discover clubs and other resources related to their interests and hobbies. Your children will continue to use information literacy skills throughout their lives to

- ***Manage their time more effectively.*** Your information-literate children will be able to seek out and find information—such as career opportunities, medical and parenting information, good buys, car maintenance tips, bus schedules, maps, and more—quickly and efficiently because they will know where to look and what to look for.
- ***Make informed decisions.*** Information literacy will help your children acquire relevant information and filter out biased or unreliable information (for example, from advertisements or Web sites) to make wise choices (ACRL, 1999).
- ***Maximize employment opportunities and increase job success.*** More than half of the U.S. labor force is composed of "knowledge workers"—employees whose primary marketable skills are associated with information literacy (ACRL, 1999; Brown, 1999). Your children will be more likely to find employment and succeed in the field of their choice if they are information literate (Humes, 1999).

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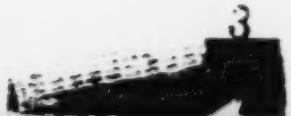

How Can I Encourage Information Literacy in My Children?

As a parent, you can contribute to your children's information literacy by sharing your love of learning with them. Let them see that you are always expanding your skills and knowledge base. Help them follow your example by directing their natural curiosity into enriching activities and showing them how to locate and use information in various formats. Some suggestions are as follows:

- ***Encourage, support, and guide your children in exploring their interests.*** Point them to various resources—such as printed materials, videos, and computers—that they can use to find out about the things that interest them and to communicate their ideas and feelings. If you don't have a computer or Internet access at home, call your local library and ask if it provides Internet access. To learn how you can use the Internet to encourage your children's information literacy, see the U.S. Department of Education's *Parent's Guide to the Internet* (http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/internet). For a free copy, call ED Pubs at 1–877–4ED–Pubs (433–7827).
- ***Use "The Big Six" to help your children with their homework.*** Help them (1) determine what is expected from their homework assignments, (2) identify the resources they will need to complete the tasks, (3) locate and access the needed resources, (4) read or use the available information, (5) apply the information to the tasks, and (6) evaluate the quality of their final product. In addition to helping your children master subject-area content, "The Big Six" helps them develop information problem-solving skills (Berkowitz, 1996).
- ***Show your children how to evaluate information.*** Teach them to think about the following questions: Who or what is the authority? How current is the information? How might different people perceive this message? What is omitted? (Imel, Kerka, and Wagner, 2000; Rafferty, 1999).
- ***Teach your children about authors.*** Point out the authors of the books they read and ask them what they think the authors are like. Explain to them that they must acknowledge other people's ideas, and show them how to document their sources.
- ***Instruct your children to consider the reliability of information from the Internet.*** Explain to them that anyone can put information on the Internet. Teach them to look for the author's qualifications and to find out what the author's sources are. Ask them to consider whether the information on a Web site is being used to sell a product (Abdullah, 1998; Branch, Kim, and Koenecke, 1999).
- ***Discuss information literacy with your children's teachers.*** Ask them how they encourage information literacy in their classrooms and what you can do to help.

What Should I Know About Information Literacy in the Schools?

One way that schools are promoting information literacy is through resource-based learning, which places student projects at the center of the curriculum and encourages students to use a variety of

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technologies to find the information they need. Students produce products—portfolios, learning and research logs, presentations, and papers—that are evaluated by their teachers [Plotnick, 1999; American Association of School Librarians (AASL), 2000]. Many students learn better from this kind of active involvement than they would from lectures and textbooks (Humes, 1999; Plotnick, 1999).

Another innovation in many schools concerns the role of libraries, which are providing more services through the Internet. Librarians (often called "library media specialists") are supporting information literacy by teaching students how to use the available technology. In some schools, librarians and teachers are working together to include technology in students' day-to-day lessons (AASL, 2000; Humes, 1999). For example, a library media specialist could work with a Spanish teacher to guide students through a variety of Spanish resources on the Internet, including interactive grammar quizzes, newspapers, and Web sites.

Where Can I Get More Information?

You will be better able to ensure that your children develop the information skills they need as you increase your own knowledge of information literacy. You can learn more about information literacy at your local library, on the Internet, or by contacting organizations specializing in information literacy. When you visit the library, ask a librarian to point you to some information literacy resources; hundreds of books and articles have been published on the subject. On the Internet, a good starting point is the *Directory of Online Resources for Information Literacy* (http://www.cas.usf.edu/lis/il). This online directory includes links to helpful articles, electronic mailing lists, and organizations and projects concerning information literacy. The following organizations also offer information literacy resources:

ERIC Clearinghouse on Information & Technology
Syracuse University
621 Skytop Road, Suite 160
Syracuse, NY 13244–5290
Toll Free: 800–464–9107
Phone: 315–443–3640
Fax: 315–443–5448
E-mail: eric@ericir.syr.edu; askeric@askeric.org
Web: http://ericir.syr.edu/ithome
AskERIC Web: http://www.askeric.org

National Forum on Information Literacy
San Jose State University
One Washington Square
San Jose, CA 95192–2419
Phone: 408–924–2419
Fax: 408–924–2800
E-mail: pbrevik@email.sjsu.edu
Web: http://www.infolit.org

Sources

References identified with ED are documents abstracted in the ERIC database. They are available in microfiche collections at more than 900 locations or in paper copy and, in some cases, electronically from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service at 1–800–443–ERIC (3742). Call 1–800–LET–ERIC (538–3742) for more details.

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